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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 7213  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 6454  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 5112  
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 7314  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4071  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 2288  
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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 2274  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 3360  
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RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RHMFIUU/COMSIXTHFLT PRIORITY

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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Maariv reports today on a meeting that took place yesterday between Defense Minister Ehud Barak and the Chairman of hesder yeshiva deans, Rabbi Haim Druckman, in an attempt to reach an understanding between the parties on the issue of the Har Bracha yeshiva. The

meeting, which was described as difficult, apparently bore no results. A rabbi whom Maariv describes as known for his moderate views, was quoted as saying, "We have no idea what the defense minister wants. He slammed the door on all our proposals to bring this affair to rest, even when he learned that Rabbi Melamed was willing to sign that he opposes protest in the IDF. At this rate he will push us towards unraveling the entire package. The majority of hesder yeshiva directors oppose insubordination and support service in the IDF." Rabbi Melamed is apparently still deliberating as to whether to add his signature to a letter by all hesder yeshiva rabbis opposing demonstrations in the IDF. In his column in the national religious newspaper Besheva, Melamed wrote, among other things: "Though I knew that because of the defense minister's imperiousness, things could come to the termination of the arrangement with the Har Bracha Yeshiva, with all the consequences this entails, I am committed to maintaining the Torah principle of independent judgment, without succumbing to his tyranny. For this reason neither did I agree to report to a 'hearing' or a 'summons' under an ultimatum, words that fail to honor those who are entitled and committed to freedom of thought and expression."

On the front page of Ha'aretz this morning, senior correspondent Aluf Benn reveals the last offer presented by former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for the borders of a Palestinian state. The report includes a map of territories and settlements that would be annexed to Israel and areas that would be handed over to the Palestinians in exchange.

Yediot reports that nearly 50 Knesset members have signed an unusual parliamentary petition calling for a boycott of British products in response to the recommendation of British officials that products made in the West Bank and on the Golan Heights be marked in order to assist those who wish to boycott such products.

Block Quotes:

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Mideast:

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#### I. "Abbas now"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (12/17): "As could have been expected, the limited construction freeze in the settlements has not brought the Palestinian leaders back to the negotiating table.... The decision to give incentives to ... settlements will not contribute to building trust between Netanyahu and Abbas. Netanyahu is continuing to walk a tightrope between ... a two-state solution and his desire to placate the settlers ... and the governing coalition. Abbas [is] in a bind, hoping to end the occupation but fearing that a retreat from principles such as Jewish construction in East Jerusalem would play into the hands of his Hamas rivals. Abbas suggested a way out of the dilemma: freezing Jewish construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem for six months without making a public declaration to that effect.... If Netanyahu and Barak truly wish to preserve the two-state option and avoid the collapse of the Palestinian leadership that supports it, they must respond positively to Abbas' proposal.... The bitter lesson of Netanyahu and Barak's previous terms in office should have taught them that a leader who tries to advance the peace process and maintain Israel's standing in the world while reconciling with the extreme right loses in the end. This time their acrobatics could end in the loss of an important partner for peace and a deterioration in Israel's foreign relations."

#### II. "Hamas still wants to liberate 'all of Palestine'"

Senior commentator Ari Shavit wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (12/17): "The cat is out of the bag: Palestine, all of Palestine.... Ismail Haniyeh this week declared the objective of the Hamas movement.... The ultimate solution is not the total liberation of the Gaza Strip or a Palestinian state. It is the liberation of all of Palestine. In recent years, quite a number of experts have promised us that Hamas does not really mean it. PA Chairman Abbas is an alternative to Hamas. Two days ago Abbas told Haaretz correspondent Avi Issacharoff that an agreement could be reached within six months.... But every time an Israeli leader takes another

significant step toward Abbas, Abbas becomes evasive. Minister Benny Begin says the reason is that Fatah is also a Greater Palestine movement.... [Abbas]has been talking about two states for the past 21 years, without being willing to pay the price. Both Hamas and Fatah are making it very difficult to end the occupation. The alternative is an Israeli initiative. MK Shaul Mofaz's plan is one possibility; a second disengagement is another. Whatever the case, Israel must deal with the existential threat of the occupation on its own. Time is running out and the writing is on the wall. 'Palestine,' the wall is blaring, 'all of Palestine.'

### III. "Three States for Two Peoples"

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (12/17): "In the original plan ... Hamas and Abu Mazen worked on a four-stage scenario: reconciliation between the camps, a joint police force in Rafah, opening the border crossings, and only then an exchange deal that would lead to the release of Gilad Shalit. Meanwhile, there is no reconciliation, the police of Ramallah cannot set foot in the Gaza Strip, Gaza is closed completely, and there is no deal.... The vocal declarations about the unilateral establishment of a Palestinian state vanished all at once. In a creeping process, people in Gaza and the ... West Bank are working on two separate states for the same people. Down in Gaza ... the government runs the tunnel economy together with the military wing, which prevents terror attacks almost entirely. Suddenly a terrorist group shouts ... that it has no intention of recognizing Israel, yet makes a great deal of effort to maintain calm. Even the delineation of borders ... the right of return for Palestinian refugees ... and the trucks of cement and concrete for the rebuilding of the Gaza Strip are stuck without an expiration date. Abu Mazen will not go wild for the good of Gaza, and Hamas, for its part, does not intend to give Israel an excuse to call in the Air Force. Meanwhile, there is calm. No one is raising his head to complain. No one is standing up with a plan for a high-speed train or an elevated bridge between Gaza and the West Bank, either. Yasser Arafat may turn over three times in his grave: once for the State of Israel, a second time for the state of Gaza, and a third time in a wide circle around his gravesite in Ramallah."

### IV. "The Weak Link"

Intelligence affairs writer and television anchor Ronen Bergman opined in the mass-circulation pluralist Yediot Aharonot (12/17): "Cooperation between the extremist elements (Syria, Iran, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah) which has skyrocketed over the past year, constitutes a strategic threat to Israel. None of this is taken for granted. Sheikh Yassin [had] refused Iranian offers of funding and training. But Mashal was noted ... for his close ties with Iran. Hizbullah's accomplishments during the war in 2006 and the series of blows that all the members of the axis took afterwards ... made the cooperation between them truly amazing. Israeli intelligence has reported [that weapons] development takes place in Iran [and] manufacturing goes on in Syria. The smuggling of the weapons is carried out along routes that are common to all the members - towards Lebanon, Syria, or Gaza and the West Bank. But director of IDF Intelligence Amos Yadlin raised another matter: Syria is actually the weak link. He and IDF Intelligence Research Department Director Yossi Baidatz believe that Syria can be uprooted from the axis and that a peace treaty may be signed with it. They believe that cutting Syria off from the axis will lead to the dissolution of the entire front, or at least to a dramatic weakening. The director of the Mossad Meir Dagan believes that Assad would agree to sign, but would not leave the axis. Netanyahu has not yet decided between them.

CUNNINGHAM